



*Embassy of the United States of America*

# Super Bowl Sunday

An Unofficial Holiday for Millions



Arthur Jones of the Baltimore Ravens kisses the Vince Lombardi Trophy after his team's victory in Super Bowl XLVII in 2013. © AP Images

**E**ach year, on a Sunday at the end of January or beginning of February, tens of millions of Americans declare their own unofficial holiday. Gathered in groups large and small, nearly half of all U.S. households participate vicariously in a televised spectacle that has far outgrown its origins as a sporting event.

The Super Bowl, which determines the championship of American football, is most of all a shared experience, when Americans disproportionately choose to spend this day in the company of friends.

Neither the hugely popular Major League Baseball World Series nor the National Basketball

Association championship commands so intense a grip on the nation's attention. Possibly this is because the Super Bowl is a single game, a winner-take-all contest. Add in the entertainments that have sprung up around the game and Super Bowl Sunday becomes an event even for those who are not football fans.

## Super Bowl Beginnings

American football is unrelated to the game most of the world knows by that name, which Americans and some others call soccer. For most of its history, professional American football was played within a single National Football League (NFL). In 1960, a rival league, the American

Football League (AFL), began to compete for premier talent. As the leagues contemplated a merger, they agreed to a single game each year between their respective champions. Because many collegiate football championships were known as "bowls" for the bowl-shaped stadiums that hosted them, one AFL owner referred to the new game as a "super" bowl. The name stuck.

Four Super Bowl games were played before the two leagues merged in 1970 into a single National Football League, which was subdivided into the American and National "conferences." Each year, the champion teams of each conference play against each other



in the Super Bowl to determine the NFL champion.

While most U.S. sports championships are determined in the home cities of the contestants, a Super Bowl — as with the Olympics and the World Cup — is awarded to a city some three to five years in advance, opening the door to broad marketing and promotional opportunities. Because the game is played in winter, it affords warm cities like New Orleans, Miami and Los Angeles a substantial advantage. However, East Rutherford, New Jersey, won the bidding to host the 2014 championship game, Super Bowl XLVIII — between the Denver Broncos of the American conference and the Seattle Seahawks of the National conference — on February 2.

This will be the first time that the game will be played in an open-air stadium in a cold-weather city, and weather forecasts are predicting that the temperature at MetLife Stadium will be less than 4 degrees Celsius, which is the current Super Bowl record.

A Super Bowl generates substantial economic activity within its host city. Many ticket holders, media representatives and others arrive a week before the game, exploring the area and spending freely.

Cities that seek to host the game must submit environmental plans detailing how they plan to make the Super Bowl as “green” as possible.

### A Social Event

Americans increasingly are gathering in private Super Bowl



National Guard members watch the Super Bowl at the New Jersey Governor's mansion. © AP Images

parties, where they enjoy food, drink and televised football with family and friends. The game is always played on a Sunday, when most Americans are not at work. Because of the event's national prominence, even Americans who are not football fans might adopt a team just for Super Bowl Sunday.

Some of the most-watched television programs in U.S. history have been Super Bowls. The game played in 2012, Super Bowl XLVI, set a record of 111.3 million viewers. Super Bowl XLV in 2011 had an audience of 111 million viewers and broke the record set by the 2010 game as the most-watched U.S. television program in history. Another key to the Super Bowl's success is the carefully choreographed entertainment events that surround the game itself. The “halftime show,” musical and other entertainment offered by major stars, takes place on the field during the mid-game rest period. In

2014, Bruno Mars and the Red Hot Chili Peppers will be performing. For many television viewers, the highlight of the Super Bowl isn't the game, it's the commercials. Advertisers compete to display their most creative efforts and introduce their newest products. Given the huge audience, advertisers are willing to pay dearly to parade their wares on the Super Bowl broadcast. In 2014, a 30-second ad will cost \$4 million.

Although serious football fans would disagree, Super Bowl Sunday, for millions of Americans, is less about which team prevails than it is about fun. Whether at the stadium or with family and friends in front of the television, most Americans find something to enjoy on this unofficial national holiday. Additional information on the game is available on the official website of Super Bowl XLVIII.